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judge it to be sulphurated iron mixed with copper or some other metal; for it appeared to be slightly attracted by the magnet, which is an evident proof that a considerable part of it must be iron. In addition to what the Dr. has observed, that there must formerly have been a volcano on the Gay Head, I would inform your excellency, that an elderly man, who was in company with us, told me, that his mother had informed him, that she could remember when it was common to see a light upon Gay Head in the night time. Others informed me, that their ancestors have told them, that the whalers used to guide themselves in the night by the lights that were seen upon Gay Head.

I desire your Excellency would communicate my letter, together with Dr. Baylies', to the Academy, at the next meeting. I am with great respect,

your Excellency's most obedient,

humble servant,

SAMUEL WEST.

His Excellency JAMES BOWDOIN, *Esq.* F. A. A.



XX. *Description of Gay Head.* By Dr. WILLIAM BAYLIES, F. A. A.

Dighton, July 1st, 1786.

S I R,

I HAVE, at length, executed the design, which I had formed, in consequence of an invitation from the Reverend Mr. West, of visiting Gay Head. In company with him, Col. Pope, and two others, I sailed from Bedford, in an
open

open two mast boat, early on Wednesday morning. A northerly wind carried us down the river into the midst of the bay, in an easy, agreeable manner. A calm then coming on, with a hot sun, and a constant rolling of the boat, I grew exceedingly sick. Nothing could alleviate my disagreeable feelings, but a view of Gay Head, through Quick's Hole, at the distance of about fifteen miles. A variety of colours, such as red, yellow, and white, differently shaded and combined, exhibited a scene, sufficient to captivate the mind, however distressed. In about two hours, a fresh breeze sprung up from the southwest. This obliged us to run west, to take the advantage of an opening between two of the Elizabeth's islands, several miles above Quick's Hole. On entering this, the Vineyard sound was full in sight, at about a mile a head. There the waves were very high and boisterous; and contrasted with the smoothness of the waters in the bay, formed rather an object of terror. But we soon passed it in safety; and landed on the north side of Gay Head, about a mile to the east of its northwest extremity. This we did to avoid the rocks. We beckoned to two young Indians, whom we saw on the hills above us. They immediately came; and, by the promise of a little rum, our boat was hauled up on the beach; the stores unloaded, and carried to an Indian house. Thither we followed; where I proposed refreshing myself with a dish of tea. Col. Pope joined me; but Mr. West's curiosity carried him directly on to the cliffs. During our repast, our landlord informed us, that Gay Head was between three and four miles in length, and two in breadth: and was almost

most separated from the other part of Martha's Vineyard by a large pond. The Indians inhabiting this part, when lately numbered, amounted to two hundred and three. The land produced Indian corn, rye, potatoes, peas, flax, and beans; but in small quantities, since the British General Gray deprived them of their sheep, which animal greatly enriched their soil. They now had recourse to the whites, on the east end of the island, for a supply of bread corn. Their cattle were almost starved through the winter; and of course, gave but little milk in the summer, though furnished with a plenty of sweet feed. They burned nothing but bushes, this part of the island affording no wood; and suffered much from the cold in the winter, though peat was procurable in plenty. As to religion, they were divided between the congregational and baptist persuasion: an Indian of the latter preached to them every sabbath; but they were seldom favoured with a congregational teacher. After our refreshment, we made for the cliffs. In our way, we found the soil to be good; wanting nothing but industry and proper management to render it capable of producing every kind of vegetable in perfection. It was rather light and dry, consisting of a greyish sand, and vegetable mould, two feet or more in depth, intermixed with portions of a darker coloured earth. It manifests to the taste a strong impregnation of the vitriolick acid; and contains many bright shining particles. Underneath this to a level with the sea, it is made up of a mixture of ochrey, sandy, stony, marly, and loamy earth, tasting also of the vitriolick acid. The water seemed to be tolerable; one spring
in

in particular, had nothing disagreeable or foreign in its taste, but on the contrary was quite sweet and palatable.

After our arrival at the cliffs, we looked round for a place of descent. This, in a little time, we found. But, I must confess, I proceeded on with great caution, and some fear; knowing that one false step would bring me to the bottom much sooner than I could wish. On one side, we had a red, unctuous, argillaceous earth; on the other, a blue, white, and yellow one, variegated with grey, black, and green spots, and masses of charcoal under our feet. When we had descended, on looking back, the idea of a volcano struck us at once. In fact, it had all the appearance of having blown out but a few days. That it was formerly a volcano, was confirmed by a further examination. Large stones, whose surfaces were vitrified; great numbers of small ones, cemented together by melted sand, and also cinders were to be seen in many places. A black, footy, powder, similar to lamp black, and made use of by painters to serve the same purposes, under which a whitish matter resembling the gypseous earth calcined intermixed with the same kind of earth uncalcined, were to be found in great quantities. Besides, there are very plain marks of four or five different craters. The most southerly, and perhaps, the most ancient, as it is grown over with grass, now called the Devil's Den, is at least twenty rods over at the top, fourteen and a half at the bottom, and full one hundred and thirty feet at the sides; except that which is next the sea, where it is open. Add to this, a tradition prevalent among the natives: In former times, the Indian God, Moiship, resided

resided in this part of the island; and made the crater, described above, his principal feat. To keep up his fires, he pulled up the largest trees by the roots; on which, to satisfy his hunger, he broiled the whale, and the great fish of the sea, throwing out the refuse sufficient to cover several acres. He did not consume all himself; but with a benevolent hand, often supplied them with food ready cooked. To facilitate the catching these fish, he threw many large stones, at proper distances, into the sea, on which he might walk with greater ease to himself. This is now called the Devil's bridge. On a time, an offering was made to him of all the tobacco on Martha's Vineyard, which having smoked, he knocked the snuff out of his pipe, which formed Nantucket. When the Christian religion took place in the island, he told them, as light had come among them, and he belonged to the kingdom of darkness, he must take his leave; which, to their great sorrow, he accordingly did; and has never been heard of since.—Had this been a Grecian or an Egyptian fable, how many volumes of explanations, resolutions, and comments, it would have given rise to!

We tarried on the island till between twelve and one o'clock the next day, walking round, ascending, descending, and examining the cliffs. We reckoned they were about a mile and a half in extent, and in height 150 feet. They appeared to be composed principally of clays, of all colours, and unctuous to the touch. The red, used as a paint, undoubtedly derives its colour from the calx of iron. The blue shoots out copperas in considerable plenty; and we
found

found hard heavy pieces of matter, sparkling with small granulated particles of a white colour, imbedded therein. This, it is probable, will afford something of the metallick kind. There were also other large heavy pieces of a reddish colour, resembling manganese. Small streams of water ran down the sides of the cliffs, more especially in the morning; every one of these had more or less of the vitriolick taste.

The bones of whales, sharks' teeth, and petrified shell-fish, are frequently picked up, scattered up and down the cliff, at a considerable distance above the surface of the water.

The sea, it is said, has made great encroachments on this part of Gay Head. Within thirty years, it has swept off fifteen or twenty rods. Had Neptune thus demolished part of Vesuvius or Ætna, up to their very craters; and laid open all their secrets, how would the curious in Europe have flocked from all quarters to behold a scene so full of wonders! But Gay Head is scarcely mentioned in America.

The wind being favourable, we launched our boat; and run, against the tide, to Bedford, thirty miles at least, in three hours and a half.

I am,

with great respect,

your humble servant,

WILLIAM BAYLIES.

To the President of the Academy.